

Watershed, 1 Canon's Road, Harbourside, Bristol BS1 5TX

Box Office: 0117 927 6444

Watershed September 2009 Podcast

Apologies for the late arrival of this podcast but I am still drying out after a quintessential British summer holiday. Part of my holiday was a busman's – taken up with selecting and scheduling the **Encounters Short Film Festival** which takes place in November. We have somewhere in the region of 1500 submissions which are whittled down in pre-selection to yes's and maybe. We also invite films from various short film festivals including the shorts strand at Cannes and Berlin.

In previous years this has entailed me clutching bags of DVDs finding a space big enough and spreading the discs all around, watching and compiling as I go. However this year all the films have been digitised which means all 300 odd films were on my laptop my viewing could go with me.

Once I get over the dread of "Will we get as good films as last year?" the process is amazingly stimulating as you jump from range of styles and techniques and across countries. The energy and ideas that can get compressed into less than 30 minutes is extraordinary and profoundly refreshing to any jaded festival programmer. It always reminds me - or at least the thought that always goes through my head - that maybe I am looking at the new Shane Meadows, Jane Campion, Danny Boyle, Alexander Sukurov.

One example of this feeling coming to reality is Andrea Arnold whose second feature film **Fish Tank** opens this month at Watershed. I came across Andrea's short films whilst looking for material for Encounters. Her early work *Dog* stood head and shoulders above the rest. It was a powerful accomplished short film. This was followed up by *Wasp*, which went on to win the Oscar for Best Short Film. Andrea memorably described – in front of multimillion tv audience – receiving the Oscar as the dogs bollocks. This was no affectation – Andrea and her films tell it as she feels it.

Her natural progression to feature films led to **Red Road**, her debut feature set in the Red Road flats of Glasgow. It was a very strong film but for me something felt missing. Perhaps it was the South London working class girl dealing with the unfamiliar terrain of another country. Maybe it was the experience of working with Lars von Trier's

company Zentropa (we all know Lars can be an uncomfortable experience!). Whatever it was there was something missing.

Then I saw her new film **Fish Tank** and this was like being in the presence of full force Andrea - passionate, committed, brash and beautiful. She has taken that millstone of British cinema - social realism - and given it a huge kick up the behind with a lyrical defiant celebratory female touch. The performance by Katy Jarvis in the lead role is quite extraordinary given that she had no previous acting experience. The scenes between her and Michael Fassbender I would say are most brilliantly directed and acted in recent British cinema. Andrea's decision to shoot it in academy ratio is intriguing - the effect though is of energy bursting out of this old fashioned cinema ratio. As I write I have invited Andrea to come back to Encounters to discuss her journey from shorts to features - watch this space.

Fish Tank opens **on Friday 11th September.**

One route to feature filmmaking is through shorts but another is to simply get out there and make a feature by hook or by crook. **Shank** is one just film and I'm particularly impressed by it because it was made in Bristol and was directed by a 21 year old. It's not at all perfect, it's lack of money sometimes shows, the script could have done with a good polish but for sheer force of getting it out there producer Christian Martin has to be commended. It's gone onto win a number of awards at international lesbian and gay film festivals and in director Simon Pearce there is clearly a talent to watch.

Shank also opens on **Friday 11th September.**

Also this month coming from the Bristol locale is **Sno Angel Winging It** a documentary about a recent tour of alt American musician Howe Gelb. It's the way these things happen. I got an email from a Bristol based film editor to see if I was interested in seeing this project he had just finished. It was the aforementioned documentary made by Maria Mochnacz. I watched it and loved the feel of the film - also loved the music - which I am ashamed to say (but didn't admit) I didn't know. This was sometime in March/April this year. The upshot is that I've managed to get its premiere at Cambridge Film Festival followed by few dates around the country. Howe and Maria will be at the events and tantalisingly so will Howe's guitar. Promises to be a special event.

The event premieres at the Cambridge Film Festival on Tue 22nd Sept then is at the ICA in London on the 23rd, here at Bristol on the 24th and finally at Broadway cinema in Nottingham on the 25th.